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STATE FOR EUR/UBI, EUR/RPM, SCA
OSD FOR DASD DANIEL FATA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/19/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [NL](#)
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: DASD FATA'S JULY 13 VISIT
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TO THE HAGUE

REF: THE HAGUE 1340

Classified By: CDA Michael Gallagher, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During his meetings with Dutch officials on July 13, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for European and NATO Policy Daniel Fata discussed the Dutch decision on whether to extend in some capacity its ISAF mission in Afghanistan. Dutch officials were receptive to Fata's suggestion of an ISAF "campaign plan" to better link Afghan Government priorities with ISAF's Operations Plan. Dutch officials expressed appreciation for the extension of U.S. helicopter support to January 2008, and Fata stressed the importance for the Dutch and other Allies to solve this potential helicopter support shortfall. Other issues discussed included OEF/ISAF command and control issues, the importance of strategic communication, and the EU training mission to Afghanistan, as well as Kosovo and NATO AWACS

aircraft re-engining. Dutch officials also raised a draft letter from Regional Command-South contributors to the Afghan Government requesting increased access to detainees for the Afghan Independent Human Rights Council. End summary.

Meeting with MFA Deputy Political Director

¶2. (C) Fata met with MFA Deputy Political Director Wim Geerts on July 13. Per reftel, Geerts reported that the six key ministers closely involved with the debate over whether to extend the Dutch ISAF mission in Afghanistan gave Dutch officials the "greenlight" to begin informal consultations with NATO on extension options.

Meeting with Vice CHOD

¶3. (U) Fata met with the Dutch Vice Chief of Defense (VCHOD), Lieutenant General Rob Bertholee on July 13. The Director for Plans and Policy, Rear Admiral Matthieu Borsboom, and the Deputy Chief for International Military Cooperation, Colonel Arie Vermeij also were in attendance.

¶4. (C) AWACS re-engining: Fata said Dutch MOD State Secretary Cees van der Knaap recently raised with Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England the issue of re-engining NATO AWACS aircraft based out of Geilenkirchen, Germany to reduce noise pollution in the Netherlands. Fata reiterated that the U.S. Air Force has no requirement to re-engine these aircraft; a surplus of original engines makes re-engining even less cost-effective. Fata added, however, that if the Dutch could successfully make the case at NATO that the aircraft must be re-engined in order to reduce noise complaints, then the U.S. would not stand in the way. VCHOD understood the U.S. position, but said the issue was of high interest in Parliament, and therefore would not go away.

¶5. (C) ISAF Extension in Afghanistan: VCHOD emphasized the decision to extend was "political" in nature; there is no reason not to extend from the military perspective. He explained that in the Dutch political process, Parliament wants to be "deeply involved" before, during, and after a decision has been made. VCHOD emphasized that the current two-year mandate until August 2008 will not be affected by the current debate. But the possibility of extending beyond the current mandate must be debated and decided now in order for requisite military and financial planning to take place in the event of a decision to extend.

¶6. (C) VCHOD mentioned four basic extension options: withdrawal following termination of the current mission's mandate, with NATO determining who will take over; partnering with other Allies and stepping down as the lead; remaining in Uruzgan as the lead but in a more limited capacity with contributions and support from other countries; or remaining in Uruzgan as currently deployed. VCHOD said he favored the third option to remain in Uruzgan as the lead nation with additional support from other countries; he did not consider feasible the option to move the Dutch deployment to another location in Afghanistan, such as in Regional Command-North or East. He described the prevailing opinion within the government as "uncertain," but was confident wide government support could be gained for an extension.

¶7. (C) ISAF Campaign Plan: Fata argued the need for an "ISAF Campaign Plan," which he envisioned as a three- to five-year plan for how ISAF helps the Afghan Government achieve its goals. Such a document could be used to help explain the mission to host nation governments, plan for future supporting force structure, set benchmarks, and act as a blueprint for action. By providing a clear explanation of the mission and goals, it might also encourage other non-NATO nations to come in with contributions. Fata said that SACEUR had already tasked JFC Brunssum and COMISAF to work up a draft. VCHOD supported the idea, and pointed out that it would provide better continuity within ISAF, rather than having the mission description and goals change every time there was a new lead nation.

¶8. (C) Helicopter Support: VCHOD expressed appreciation for the U.S. decision to extend its helicopter support in Afghanistan until January 2008. Fata replied that this is an important issue for SecDef, and that SecDef told Allies at the June NATO Ministerial he expected the Alliance to develop a plan to generate the required helicopter support by the time of the next NATO Defense Ministerial in October. Fata

asked what steps the Dutch were taking to alleviate this gap. VCHOD said the GONL supports the call for more helicopter support, but he did not think the helicopters could or should come from the Netherlands. In addition to Apache attack helicopters, he said the Dutch have three Chinooks permanently deployed in Afghanistan, while two additional Chinooks had been lost in the deployment. The GONL has agreed to purchase six new Chinooks, but these will not be available until 2009. The VCHOD recently approved an increase in flying hours, but cannot raise the number of airframes. He said the Dutch are looking at lease options, including for Russian helicopters and fixed wing aircraft, but aircrews are limited. He added that "eighty percent" of all Dutch helicopter missions in Afghanistan are flown in support of other Allies. Fata emphasized that the Dutch should be working with Allies to address this potential shortfall; VCHOD suggested NATO was working to address it now.

¶9. (C) OEF/ISAF Issues: VCHOD raised ISAF Command and Control (C2), noting he was "happy at this time." Previously there had been concerns about "dual-hattedness" blurring the distinction between ISAF and OEF, but he could "live" with the current arrangement. From an ISAF perspective, he said, there must be coordination, not command and control, with OEF missions. VCHOD stressed European sensitivities to linking ISAF and OEF -- a C2 structure might make perfect military sense but is politically problematic. He also commented that the COMISAF headquarters structure is too large, and does not function as well as it could due to the lack of fluent English capability by many officers on the staff. That said, all operational slots are filled by the U.S. and the UK, which he claimed was a Dutch concern. He emphasized that the Netherlands is making a major contribution in the south, and therefore wants to have a general officer in an operational billet at COMISAF headquarters, such as Chief of Staff or Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations.

¶10. (C) Kosovo: Fata raised the necessity of contributing troops should the political process in Kosovo continue to deteriorate, and asked if the Dutch could make such a contribution. VCHOD said the Dutch have only a few officers in billets in the headquarters. He was unsure of the Dutch reaction should UN Security Council discussions prove unable to resolve the situation. He suggested that if other countries are pulling out of KFOR due to the inability to obtain a UN mandate and subsequent EU mission, it would be unlikely that the GONL would make a decision to contribute additional troops.

Interagency Lunch

¶11. (U) Fata attended a Dutch interagency lunch hosted by MOD Director for General Policy Affairs Lo Casteleijn on July 13. Dutch attendees included MFA Director of Security Affairs Robert de Groot, and Rear Admiral Borsboom.

¶12. (C) ISAF Campaign Plan: Fata suggested a "ISAF Campaign Plan" as a means to link the Afghan government's national strategy with the ISAF Operations Plan. This relatively short document could provide a blueprint of goals and priorities for the next three to five years, while at the same time, provide a method to measure achievements and demonstrate success. The plan should be made public, and used to help explain to both Afghan and Allied parliaments and public what ISAF is trying to accomplish. The plan could also help focus forces and resources, and pinpoint areas in which forces could be stepped up or down. Finally, the plan might provide interested countries a better sense of where and in what capacity they might make a positive contribution.

¶13. (C) Casteleijn supported the proposal, noting benefits from the perspective of the Dutch extension debate. De Groot also expressed interest, but cautioned the plan not include explicit reference to reconstruction -- "that is not ISAF's responsibility," he said. Focusing on Afghan Security Force benchmarks, he suggested, would be appropriate. OSD ISAF Coordinator COL Vogl suggested reconstruction operations be included in some capacity, especially as many European allies are making the case to their respective parliaments that ISAF is providing a supportive role for reconstruction operations. De Groot said the campaign plan could be interpreted as an "exit strategy," with eventual turnover to Afghan

authorities. He agreed with Casteleijn that the plan would make a "political statement" -- as such, it should also address collateral damage. Fata suggested that the NATO Senior Civilian Representative might act as the plan's "validator," and work with President Karzai to articulate his goals in the plan.

¶14. (C) Strategic Communication: Casteleijn raised the importance of NATO improving strategic communication and public outreach. He said that press conferences are frequent in Kabul, but such information is lost before it ever reaches capitals. He called for better ISAF guidelines regarding reporting casualties -- for example, ISAF confirmed that NATO soldiers had been the target of a suicide attack in Tarin Kowt before Dutch authorities were able to contact their families. While ISAF had not disclosed the nationality of the soldiers involved, "all family members know that the Dutch are serving in Tarin Kowt -- we need time to break the news to the families." At the same time, de Groot said, the Dutch understand that ISAF needs to act quickly to counter the message of the Taliban in the press -- these pressing needs conflict with one another.

¶15. (C) Fata mentioned the need to get the message out on reconstruction projects, and noted ISAF laminate cards contain the latest facts on reconstruction efforts -- such cards could be better used. De Groot said "data alone" seldom does the trick; the GONL sends the latest figures on their reconstruction efforts to the Dutch parliament, but such information is often dismissed as propaganda. Instead, he said the GONL is working with film crews to interview "ordinary" Afghans who are willing to express gratitude for the Dutch mission, and hope that NATO will stay. De Groot said President Karzai also has to do more to publicly commend ISAF. He said the Dutch have tried to tabulate over the past month how many times Karzai had spoken positively about ISAF and could not find many instances. De Groot said Karzai often commends ISAF in private, but never in public.

¶16. (C) Helicopter Support: Fata reiterated SecDef's challenge that Allies develop a plan to generate the necessary helicopter support by the October NATO Defense Ministerial. He understood the Dutch have limited capabilities, but questioned what the Dutch were doing to work with others to solve the potential helicopter shortage. Fata noted that SecDef may likely raise this issue with Dutch Defense Minister van Middelkoop during his trip to Washington in September. Casteleijn acknowledged the message -- "we are carefully listening," but suggested this was a NATO problem, and not just a Dutch one. Fata argued the Dutch should be taking an active role in talking to Allies who are not risking forces in the south -- if these countries will not commit helicopters, then perhaps they might contribute financially for helicopter maintenance and support.

¶17. (C) EU Training Mission: De Groot commented on the planned EU training mission in Afghanistan -- while the mission may appear "very little" in comparison to U.S. efforts, it represents a step in the right direction that could potentially grow. Fata related a phone call from Robert Cooper, the EU's Director for External and Politico-Military Affairs, requesting U.S. assistance in providing intelligence and leasing NATO-interoperable radios. Fata noted that the U.S. does not want the EU mission to fail, but the request was "awkward" when one considers how many EU members are also members of NATO. De Groot suggested that the request could be viewed as an attempt to get the USG involved with the EU mission.

¶18. (U) De Groot passed to Fata a draft letter from Regional Command-South contributing countries to the Afghan Government requesting greater access to detainees for the Afghan Independent Human Rights Council. De Groot noted that all RC-South contributors had approved the letter, except the United States, and asked if any progress had been made in Washington on reviewing the letter.

¶19. (U) DASD Fata has cleared on this cable.

GALLAGHER